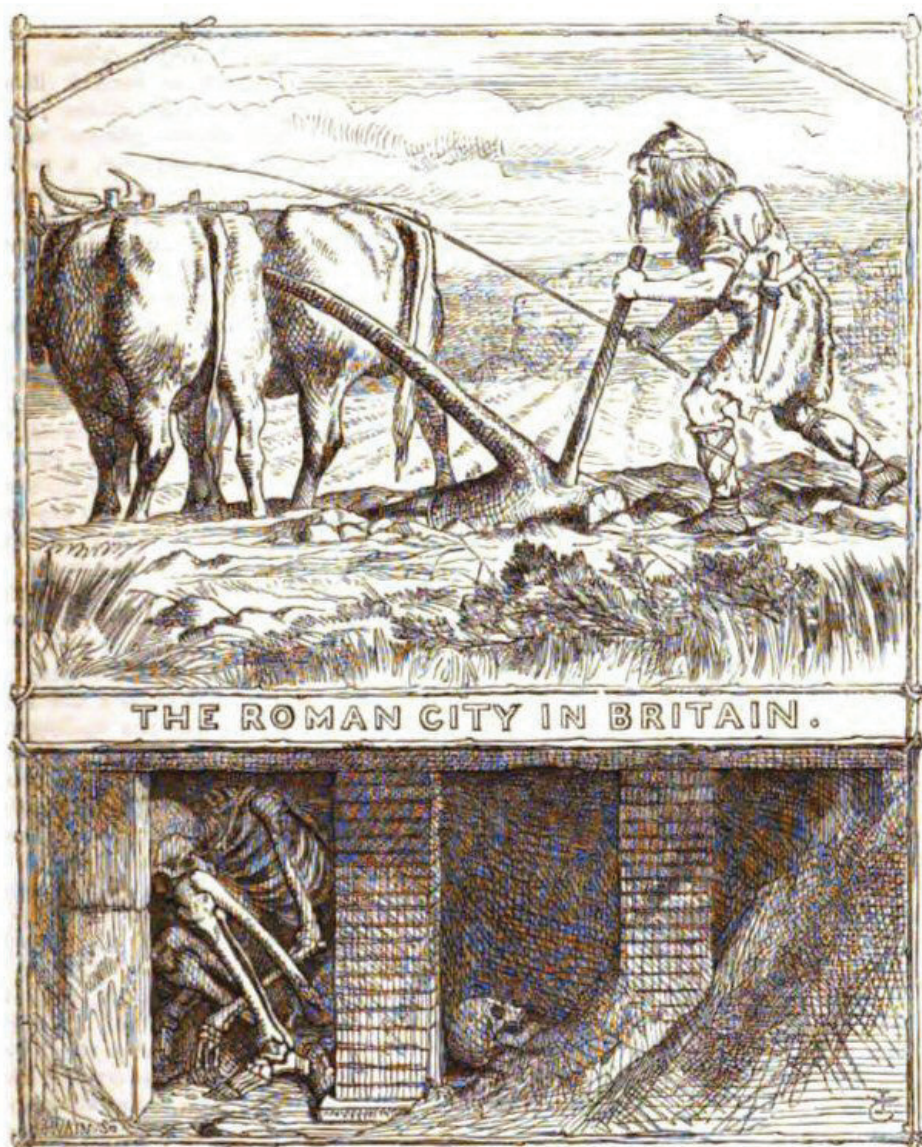


OUR OWN VIEW OF URICONIUM.



WE had been traversing the London Road, which leads out of Shrewsbury by its eastern suburb, skirting every now and then the silvery Severn, meandering through a park-like country, when my companion turned the horse's head down a bye-road on the right, which speedily led us amid some undulating pastures. "And now," said he, as the carriage jerked over a ridge in the road; "now—we are in the Roman City."

I looked around me. There were undulating fields and crops of turnips, hedge-rows and trees—an English landscape, pure and simple, such as we meet with everywhere in the luxuriant western counties. "But where have the Romans left their mark?" I asked, half incredulously. My companion pointed with his whip to a dark object a little in advance—a weather-beaten wall which rose, a massive and significant ruin, in the midst

of the pastoral scenery surrounding us. As we drew near, the Cyclopean mass of grey stones, streaked at intervals with bright red lines of tile-work, left no doubt upon our minds. "And if you will observe narrowly," said my companion, "you will see indications of the line of the walls." And truly an irregular line, inclosing a somewhat pear-shaped area, could be traced, its long diameter running north and south, the stem of the pear, if we may so term it, dipping down into the waters of the rapid Severn. This ridge of buried town-wall, my companion tells me, makes a circuit of three miles; and as I traced it round about, I could see underneath the emerald sod suggestive outlines, now dipping under the hedge-rows, now crossing the brook, and next upheaving the middle of the field. It was clearly the dead and ruined city, dimly sketched beneath its winding-sheet of common grass. In another minute we were close to the old wall itself, which cropped up suddenly from the edge of a turnip field—a huge bone, as it were, of the buried skeleton beneath. To the south of this wall a square area, about two acres in extent, railed off from the adjoining fields, presented itself, trenched in every direction and heaped with mounds of rubbish. A crowd of visitors were lounging about, looking down into the deep pits and trenches, with a serious puzzled look.*

"And this?" said I—

"Is where we are exhuming Roman Britain," interrupted my companion.

We alighted and passed into the inclosure. I could just see the head of a labouring man, who was delving away in a long trench. Sitting on the side of the trench was a figure dressed in black, his gaitered legs disappearing in the pit. Those who remember Landseer's picture of "Suspense"—a Scotch terrier watching at a rat-hole—will be able to appreciate the whole look and attitude of that figure as the pick broke into every fresh lump of earth. Leaving my human terrier, for a moment, still watching at his hole, I clambered over the mounds of earth and looked down at the dead bones of Roman Britain. The old wall above ground had been the starting point from which the excavations were commenced, and it was soon discovered that it was the above-ground portion of a large building in the form of a parallelogram, divided into three compartments; the middle one being 226 feet long and 30 feet wide, the side aisles, if we may so term them, being of exactly the same length, but one only 14 feet wide, and the other 13 feet 9 inches wide at one end and 16 feet at the other. The middle compartment is paved with brick in the herring-bone pattern, but portions of tessellated floors were found at the eastern extremity of the northern lateral chamber. This place is nothing less than a stone puzzle to the archaeologists. Apparently, it was not roofed in, as few tiles were found

in the area. That it stood in the angle formed by the intersection of two streets is clearly ascertained, and that it was entered from both of them is equally clear. Along its western façade ran the great Roman military highway which connected London with Chester, still in use and known under the Saxon name of Watling Street. That this road expanded into a wide space opposite the main western entrance there can be no doubt, for it has been traced for some distance, until fresh buildings impinge upon the way and considerably narrow it.

Along the northern side of this building ran another street, joining the Watling Street wall at right angles; wherever excavations have been made in its course the pick has come down upon a surface pitched with large pebbles. The Roman streets, it is clear, were formed like those of Shrewsbury, and scores of others in Britain to this day. What public purpose this building could have served is, however, a matter of the merest conjecture. It has been suggested that it formed the forum, for the reason that it is very similar in form to the remains of the forum found at Pompeii. A curious piece of ironwork, somewhat in the form of a trident, which fitted into a staff, apparently some emblem of office, was found in its principal area.

At present, however, a veil has been drawn over the subject in the shape of a flourishing field of turnips, the committee of excavation hitherto having to manipulate their limited plot of ground somewhat as Paddy did his insufficient blanket, by filling up one place in order to expose another. Consequently, the only portion of this debateable building at present open to view is the portion of *old wall* originally above ground. This weather-beaten fragment bears upon its southern face evidence of having been connected with other buildings, for the springing of three brick arches are very plainly visible upon it, and the spade of the excavator has traced out the underground walls that supported them. Here evidently three "barrel roofed" rooms, possibly granaries, existed, as in one of them a quantity of charred wheat was found. Trenching southward soon proved that they had only opened but a small portion of some great central building of the city, for the spade at some considerable depth struck upon the semicircular end of a wall, and speedily a fine hypocaust, 37 feet long and 25 feet wide, was laid open. The Romans, it may be stated, in this country at least, did not warm their apartments by open fire-places or stoves, but by hot air chambers built underneath the ground-floors, which were supported at short intervals by rows of pillars formed of square tiles placed one upon another. Here, then, was the grand heating apparatus of a very fine room delved out of the earth in almost as perfect a state as when Roman fires circulated through it. The pillars of tiles were in perfect order,* and the soot still adhered

* Since the above was written the Excavation Committee have very judiciously caused all the earth excavated from the trenches to be collected into a steep mound, which is to be planted with evergreens and surrounded by gravel-walks. From this mound a bird's-eye view will be given to the spectator of the whole ruins laid open. The hypocausts, passages, courts, and roads will be beneath him, plainly depicted as in a map. By this means the interest of these singular remains will be greatly enhanced to the visitor.

* We regret to state, that during a temporary stoppage of the works last Easter, several inroads of the barbarians in the shape of "cheap trippers," took place, in which these pillars were wantonly thrown down; they have since been restored to their old position by the careful hand of Dr. Johnson. We regret to state, however, that the only bit of wall inscription yet found in these ruins, was by these later barbarians entirely destroyed.

to their sides as though the smoke had only passed through them yesterday. In the same line a number of other smaller hypocausts were soon exhumed. Here and there the floors of small apartments paved with the herring-bone pavement are seen, and in one spot the walls of a sweating room are still lined with the flues used to warm them, consisting of the common pottery tiles with flanged edges, employed by the Romans for roofing to this day. Passages floored with indestructible concrete lead between these rooms, and in some places the plaster still adheres to the walls, painted either in bands of red and yellow, or arranged in patterns of not inelegant design. In one place the wall is tessellated, an embellishment which is, we believe, quite unique. There is evidence also that the outsides of some of the buildings in Uriconium were plastered and painted, as the semicircular end of the large hypocaust when discovered was so finished. Similar external embellishments were discovered at Pompeii. What we may term the stoke-hole of one of these hypocausts remains still intact. Three steps, formed out of single slabs of stone, sharp almost as the day they came from the stone-dresser's hands, lead to an arched opening of splendid workmanship, which directly communicates with the hot air chamber. I could almost fancy I saw the Roman stoker shovelling in the wood and coal (for coal has been discovered here) some biting December morning, to keep life in the shivering centurion pacing above. Near this stoke-hole there was found an ash-heap—a Romano-British ash-heap!

Imagine, good reader, Macaulay's New Zealander, after taking his survey of the ruins of St. Paul's, from the broken arch of London Bridge, kicking his foot by accident against a London ash-heap, and you will perhaps be able to realise the eagerness of the Shrewsbury archaeologists. Here were discovered, as was expected, numberless unconsidered trifles, but of priceless worth, as illustrating the every-day life of the inhabitants. Fragments of pottery, broken by the Roman "cat" or "come to pieces in the hand" of the Roman housemaid, of course; hair-pins of bone, that had once fastened the back hair of some fair Lucretia, with the pomade still adhering to them (an analytic chemist could possibly tell us of what oils and scents they were composed); pieces of window-glass, through which perhaps the aforesaid beauty had peered at the beaux of Uriconium; the bones of birds and animals, and even the shells of oysters, were found mingled together with bone-needles and ornamental fibulæ, coins, &c. These things, especially the small articles of female gear, imply that this part of the large building at least was devoted in part to female use. When the workmen were clearing out the hypocaust leading from the stoke-hole, crouched up in the north-west corner, they discovered the skeleton of an old man, and close to him (the ruling passion strong in death) was found a little heap of coins, and among them fragments of wood and nails, evidently the remains of a small box or coffer, decayed by time, which had once held the old man's treasure. These coins, 132 in number, were all, with two exceptions, of copper, leading to the inference that he was a domestic.

In excavating the ruins of Pompeii, the skeleton

of what was supposed to have been the master of the house, was discovered near a back wall, with a bag of money near one hand, and a key near the other, implying that he was attempting to escape from the coming destruction by a back-door. A man had no banking account in those days; it was therefore quite natural that, in the moment of escape, he should be found clutching his treasure; but it does seem strange that, like a fly in amber, his very attitude should be preserved to us.

For centuries the Saxon hind ploughed the fields overhead, and little dreamed of the ghastly *dramatis personæ* that lay grouped beneath his feet.

It is customary when a new building is about to be erected, to deposit on the foundation-stone coins for the current year, of the reigning sovereign, in order to mark the period of its erection. Fate would appear to have led this terrified old man, with his little box of the current Roman coins of the country, into this hiding-place, to fix the time of the destruction of the city, and of the overthrow of the civilisation the Roman dominion in this country had left among the half-emascu- lated Britons. The great majority of these coins bear the effigy of the Constantines, which points to the end of the fourth century as the period of the destruction of this city. Now, if I remember rightly, the Roman Legions finally left the island in the year 426; thus it will be seen how speedily the barbarian Picts followed on their footsteps, and swept away the cities they had founded and left to the charge of the enfeebled Britons.

Close beside the west wall of the hypocaust, where the old man was found, lay the skeleton of a woman, and huddled against the north wall was another. All these skeletons were close together. In the yard adjoining, was found the skeleton of a baby, so young that its teeth were still uncut. A little eastward four or five skeletons, chiefly of females, were found, leading to the inference that the men, like the sons of Louis Philippe, deserted the weaker sex in the terrible moment of massacre. What overwhelming terror—what sudden panic must have overcome these inmates for the mother thus to desert her babe, and for the man to herd with women in such a dismal hiding-place. These tell-tale bones leave to us a vivid picture of that dreadful day—thirteen hundred years ago—when the enemy poured into the city and ravaged it with fire and sword.

Southward of this inhabited and apparently private portion of the great block of buildings, the basements of another series of structures has been found. The lower walls and the herring-bone pavement of a square court opening immediately upon the open space, or *place* of the great military way or Watling Street, have been laid bare. The court is forty feet square, and on its north and south sides runs a row of chambers from ten to twelve feet square.

Dr. Henry Johnson, the Hon. Secretary of the Excavation Committee, with classic instinct, immediately fancied that it was the atrium of a private Roman dwelling, especially as in the centre of the court the pavement was wanting, indicating the possibility of the remains of an impluvium; but, on search being made, no signs of one having been there were found; and further excavation

proved that many of the usual features of such a private mansion were wanting. There was no tablinum or peristyle, the side of the atrium or court in that direction being closed by a wall, on the outside of which are a series of recesses, supposed to have been shops. Further on in the same line eastward is a large paved cistern, filled with tiles and broken pottery; and beyond again a paved space, which had evidently been a bath. This portion of the building, however, has been only partially excavated, but what is now visible has the appearance of having belonged to a public swimming-bath. But what could the open court, surrounded with apartments, and bordering upon the principal street, have been? It is suggested that it might have been a market-place. That it was a building of great resort there can be no doubt; for of its two street entrances the step of the southernmost is worn away to the shape of the human foot several inches deep. By the direction of the footsteps, it is clear that the people flocking thither must have come up the street from the southward. Strange, that, after thirteen hundred years, we should thus have visible evidence of the direction in which the main currents of human life used to flow in this ancient city. There is a much wider entrance to this supposed market-place, or bazaar, a little north of the foot entrance, but this was not approached by steps, but by an inclined plane, formed of three slabs of stone placed side by side. Mr. Thomas Wright, the chief director of the excavations, imagines that this was a carriage, or at least a barrow entrance; and the discovery of a horse-shoe here, would seem to justify this hypothesis; but we find no wheel-ruts as they did in frequented carriage-entrances at Pompeii; moreover, a herring-bone pavement would scarcely have withstood the wear and tear of carriage traffic. The rooms round the court have proved the greatest puzzle of any to the archaeologists. The walls stand at least three feet high from the pavement, but there is no sign of any door-ways. It has been suggested, that wooden steps, long since perished, may have given entrance to them; but then we should expect to find the marks in the walls where they had been fixed, as was the case at Pompeii, where staircases appear to have been very common.

In excavating the rubbish from these rooms, in some cases to ten feet in depth, stores of different substances were found; one apparently had been a magazine of charcoal, as a large quantity of that substance was found in it. Another contained the bones, horns, &c., of animals, chiefly those of the red deer, and the ox, and the tusks of boars. On the antlers of the deer, saw-marks, and signs of tools of other kinds, are very visible, and some of the bones have been turned in a lathe. These signs seem to indicate that the fabrication of various articles in bone, ivory, and stags' horn, found in every direction amongst the ruins, was carried on here; and that a veritable bazaar for the sale of such trifles existed on this spot we have good reason to believe from the fact, that weights of different sizes were dug up close at hand.

Not far from this court a portion of a pillar was found, the bottom of which is engraven with the *phallus*, so often discovered on Roman

remains. Possibly the pillar may have formed a portion of a Priapian pillar, or emblem of fruitfulness. If so, its vicinity to the open court may indicate that it served the purpose of a market-place for edibles, as well as that of a bazaar. Be that as it may, it is clear that this department of the great block of buildings formed its southernmost limit, for a paved street has been discovered close to its walls, along which ran a side gutter, or possibly a water-course, such as we find at Salisbury; for in one place large stones were discovered, placed transversely in the channel, as though they had been used as stepping-stones. This great public building, containing possibly a forum, establishment of baths, a market-place, and bazaar, was surrounded on three sides, at least, by streets; and, for aught we know, excavations to the eastward will prove that it formed what the Romans called an *insula*.

The discovery of numerous fragments of columns and capitals within its ruins, proves that it must have been ornamented with architectural features of a striking character, which gave it a noble appearance, situated, as it was, in the middle and on the highest spot of the city within the walls. Beyond this building excavations have been made only to a small extent southward, but sufficiently to prove that buildings exist on the other side of the street last discovered. The Committee of Excavations have evidently hit upon the most central and important spot in the city; and dig where they will, north, south, east, or west, in the four acres which the Duke of Cleveland has leased to them, they cannot avoid opening up remains which will probably help to elucidate the stone puzzle they have already exposed.

As I moved away from my minute examination of the ruins, I found the gentleman in black gathering up the precious fragments rescued from the trench with eager solicitude, which he carried off to a kind of box of Autolycus under charge of the foreman of the excavators. The labourer was digging away like a machine, and taking as much interest in his work. As he shovelled up some fragments of pottery I remarked:

"There seems to have been a grand smash of crockery hereabouts."

"Yes, sir," he replied, "there be a main sight of them sort of cattle buried here," and went on with his work. Such are the differences between man and man induced by education.

After tracing the dry bones of the Roman city, it was doubly interesting to give it life by means of the relics collected from its depths. A considerable number of articles illustrative of the everyday occupations and amusements of the inhabitants have already been secured in the museum at Shrewsbury. Pottery, of course, is in abundance, including a piece of Samian ware repaired with metal rivets, and some not inelegant Romano-Salopian pottery made from fine Broseley clay, innumerable roofing-tiles of pottery and micaceous slate with the nails yet remaining in them. Of iron work there are abundant remains; keys, chains, shackles, rings, nails, door-hinges, and an iron padlock have been found so wonderfully like uninteresting modern work, that one cannot help thinking the stilted Roman of our school-books must, after all, have

been very like one of ourselves. Turning over

patent medicine in Uriconium? Yes—an eye-salve



[ORNAMENT IN BRONZE, PROBABLY BELONGING TO A STEELYARD.
[Actual size.]



SCALE.
THE SHACKLE.
[One-fourth of the full size.]

the box of relics, my friend in the black gaiters has directed my attention to—what do I find?—scores of cock's legs with natural spurs, filed evidently to fit on bronze ones. That they knew how to fight a main of cocks at Uriconium is quite evident, and those legs in all probability were those of celebrated victors. Searching again, I found a cock made of lead, evidently a *child's toy*, that had once gladdened little Roman eyes not far from where I stood. Again rummaging, I come upon roundels formed from the bottoms of earthenware vessels, evidently used by the gamins of Uriconium in some game, possibly hop-scotch, which we know to be a pastime of remote antiquity. And then for the ladies, as Autolycus would say, I found in the museum, combs of bone, bodkins, beads, bracelets; and for the men, *studs* and *buttons* of bronze, a strigil to scrape his skin in the public sweating bath, and tweezers to tweak his curled beard. But what is this—a



THE LEADEN (TOY) COCK.
[Actual size.]

—here is the seal of the physician who vended it, marked, like Rowland's Macassar, with his name to prevent "unprincipled imitations," as follows:—

"*The dialibanum of Tiberius Claudius, the physician for all complaints of the eyes, to be used with egg.*"

THE PHYSICIAN'S STAMP.



TIBERII CLAUDII MEDICI DIALIBANUM AD OMNE VITIUM
Oculorum EX Ovo.
[Actual Size.]

But we may go on for a week turning over the curiosities of Uriconium and come at last to the conclusion that, Romano-Britons as they were, they must have ate, drank, slept, played, and looked wonderfully like ourselves. Not so, however, if we are to believe newspaper paragraphs—the barbarians who put an end to all this refinement ages ago.

In the corner of an orchard abutting upon the Watling Street road, in the village of Wroxeter, but within the old line of walls, upwards of twenty human skeletons were a short time since exhumed, several of the skulls of which presented extraordinary appearances. Their facial bones are, in fact, all askew, the eye sockets of one side of the face being in advance of those of the other side. Such terrible-looking creatures as these real original "Angles" were certainly enough to frighten the city into subjection. An examination of these skulls, however, and a knowledge of the conditions under which they were found, would lead to the conviction that Mother Earth has to answer for this distortion. When exhumed, they were in the condition of wet biscuit, in consequence

of the state of the ground, which is full of springs. It can easily, therefore, be imagined that the weight of the superincumbent earth acting through so many centuries had pressed those skulls that had fallen sideways, thus out of their usual shape. There is in the British Museum a skull of a Saxon warrior, disinterred not long since in Cambridgeshire, with his Saxon ornaments about him, which presents similar distortions with respect to the orbits and the extraordinary elongation of the head which these Wroxeter skulls do. Judging from this fact alone, I am inclined to think that these poor people of the orchard have been shamefully maligned as to their personal appearance. Close to the spot where these remains were found, the Watling Street road dips down a steep bank towards the Severn, where there is a ford; but, in

all probability, in Roman times, a bridge here crossed the stream. Whether it was ford or bridge, however, it is certain that a strong tower—possibly a water-gate—terminating the city wall towards the river here, guarded its passage, as the foundation walls have been excavated entire. Standing on the mound which marks its site I saw before me the silvery Severn winding amid a thickly-wooded country, once, doubtless, a forest teeming with wild boar and red deer. On the opposite shore, the old military Roman road, as yet strongly marked running between hedgerows, but grass-grown like the fields. The scene was so calm and little disturbed by man, that the imagination could easily picture the Roman legions wending towards the next great military station, their eagles flashing in the setting sun. A. W.

